



CALIFORNIA HIGH SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY

Draft Program EIR/EIS

Summary of Public Comments

January 27, 2004 – August 31, 2004

September 22, 2004



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Introduction

This is a summary of comments received during the public comment period on the Draft Program EIR/EIS for the proposed California high-speed train system. Complete oral testimony and all written comments submitted between February and August 31, 2004 are included on a compact disk (PDF form) as an attachment to this document. This summary and the oral and written comments will be placed on the Authority's website following the September 22, 2004 board meeting. Responsible agency and the public oral and written comments submitted by August 31, 2004 will be addressed and responded to in the Final Program EIR/EIS.

Project Description

On February 13, 2004 the California High Speed Rail Authority (Authority), in cooperation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), released the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) on the high-speed train system proposed for intercity travel in California.

The purpose of the high-speed train (HST) system is to provide a safe, reliable mode of travel that links major metropolitan areas and delivers predictable and consistent travel times. The system would extend from Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area in the north, through the Central Valley, to Los Angeles and San Diego in the south. As demand for intercity travel in California continues to grow, this system would be an integral part of efforts to meet the state's future transportation needs.

The Draft Program EIR/EIS addressed the potential for environmental impact of the proposed HST system at a conceptual and planning level. If a decision were made to advance the HST system, site-specific project-level environmental studies would be prepared to address potential environmental effects from specific rail alignments, stations and facilities.

The Draft Program EIR/EIS evaluated the potential environmental impacts of the following three alternatives to meet California's transportation needs:

- HST system alternative – a new statewide high-speed train system, extending over 700 miles in length, and providing high-speed train travel

- Modal Alternative – improvements to existing highway and air travel networks
- No project alternative – reliance on the state’s existing transportation systems

Potential impacts studied include: noise, visual contrasts, land use, biology, wetlands, parkland and hydrology. The document recommends mitigation measures where appropriate.

Based on this analysis, the Authority and FRA identified the HST system as the preferred system alternative. The study results indicate that a HST system would be the safest, most reliable and environmentally sound mode of intercity travel to meet the state’s transportation needs in the 21st century.

Document Availability

The Draft Program EIR/EIS was released for public review and comment on January 27, 2004 and noticed in the federal register on February 13, 2004. The initial public comment period was scheduled to end May 14, 2004, but due to public requests, it was extended to August 31, 2004. Responsible agency and the public oral and written comments submitted by August 31, 2004 will be addressed and responded to in the Final Program EIR/EIS.

Notification packets announcing the availability of the Draft Program EIR/EIS were mailed on February 6, 2004 to federal cooperating agencies, other affected agencies and elected officials. The federal cooperating agencies received an announcement letter from Mehdi Morshed, Executive Director of the Authority, a hard copy of the Draft Program EIR/EIS, and a CD copy of the document with appendices. 140 other affected public agencies received an announcement letter from Mehdi Morshed, an Executive Summary and a CD copy of the document with appendices. 282 elected officials received an announcement letter from Mehdi Morshed, a Summary Brochure and a CD copy of the document with appendices.

To further publicize the release of the draft environmental document, press briefings were held in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Fresno. The Authority Board Chairperson, Joseph Petrillo, provided an overview of the project and the Draft Program EIR/EIS. Public Officials from each region made remarks expressing their views on the proposed project. Several media representatives attended each briefing.

The general public was informed of the Draft Program EIR/EIS release through distribution of a “Notice Announcement” of the document’s availability to the project mailing list. The Notice Announcement also provided the details for submitting comments by mail or fax and announced that public hearings will be held in the future. The mailing list contains approximately 10,000 statewide contacts including: federal, state, and local elected officials; federal, state and local agency representatives; chambers of commerce; environmental and transportation organizations; special interest groups; media; private entities; and members of the public. The mailing list is based on the database developed during the scoping phase. The mailing list is on file with the Authority and is available for viewing.

The Program EIR/EIS was also made available for viewing and downloading at the project's Web site, www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov. Comments were accepted directly from the website as well. The Web site also provided the opportunity to request a CD ROM of the document.

The Notice Announcement and Web site listed the 32 statewide libraries with a hard copy of the document available for review. Participating libraries were located in the following cities: Anaheim, Bakersfield, Burbank, Escondido, Fremont, Fresno, Gilroy, Irvine, Los Angeles, Merced, Modesto, Mountain View, Norwalk, Oakland, Oceanside, Ontario, Palmdale, Palo Alto, Riverside, Sacramento, San Clemente, San Diego, San Francisco, San Gabriel, San Jose, Santa Clarita, Stockton, Sylmar, Temecula, and Tulare.

The release of the Draft Program EIR/EIS was also announced through a display ad distributed in 16 statewide newspapers. The display ads were published on Friday, February 13, 2004 in the following newspapers: *Sacramento Bee*, *Daily Republic*, *Oakland Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Jose Mercury*, *Modesto Bee*, *Merced Sun Star*, *Fresno Bee*, *Bakersfield Californian*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Orange County Register*, *Antelope Valley Press*, *The Press-Enterprise*, *North County Times*, *San Diego Tribune*, and *Stockton Record*.

Public Hearing Summary

The Authority held a total of seven public hearings to present the Draft Program EIR/EIS and to receive public comments. Originally, five public hearings were scheduled, but with the extension of the public comment period to August 31, 2004, two more public hearings were planned. A court reporter was present at each of the public hearings to record oral comments. At each public hearing, oral comments could be made during the "public testimony" portion of the meeting or during the open house portion of the meeting to the court reporter at the "public comments" table. Oral comments on the Draft EIR/EIS were only accepted during the seven public hearings.

Public Hearing Notification

The public was notified of the first five public hearings through a Notice Announcement that provided the public hearing locations and schedule. The Notice Announcement was mailed on March 12, 2004 to the project mailing list (list is described in the "Document Availability" section).

The two additional public hearings were announced through a Notice Postcard mailed on May 13, 2004 to the project mailing list.

The public hearings were also announced through a second display ad distributed in 16 statewide newspapers. The display ad for the first five public hearings was published on Friday, March 19, 2004 and the ad for the two additional public hearings on May 10 and 12. The same newspapers were used as with the Notice of Availability display ad (listed in the "Document Availability" section).

Initial Five Public Hearings

Each of the five initial public hearings started at 3:00 PM and ended at 8:00 PM. From 3:00 to 4:00 PM there was an informational open house with exhibit boards available for viewing and project staff present to answer questions and discuss issues. Formal public testimony began at 4:00 PM. Authority Board Chairperson Joseph Petrillo, facilitated the public testimony. Other Board

Members, Mehdi Morshed, Executive Director of the Authority and David Valenstein, FRA Representative (at selected meetings only) were present to listen to comments. The open house resumed once all public testimony was received.

The public hearings were scheduled as follows:

- Sacramento – Tuesday, March 23, 2004
- Los Angeles – Tuesday, April 13, 2004
- San Francisco – Thursday, April 15, 2004
- San Diego – Tuesday, April 20, 2004
- Fresno – Wednesday, April 28, 2004

Additional Two Public Hearings

The two additional public hearings were held from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM, all of which was public testimony. Exhibit boards were available and project staff present to answer questions and discuss issues. Chairperson Joseph Petrillo facilitated the public testimony and other Board Members and Mehdi Morshed were present to listen to comments.

The two additional public hearings were scheduled as follows:

- San Jose – Wednesday, May 26, 2004
- Los Angeles – Wednesday, June 23, 2004

At each public hearing, speaker cards were available for public testimony. Individuals who wished to testify, submitted a speaker card and were then called in turn by the facilitator. Individual comments were time limited to provide equal opportunity for all to comment. A court reporter was present and recorded all the oral comments. Individuals were also able to make oral comments directly to the court reporter once the public testimony session had ended. Comment sheets were available for submitting written comments.

Public Hearing Overview

- **Sacramento** - Tuesday, March 23, 2004, 3:00 - 8:00 PM
Location: Tsakopoulos Library Galleria, East Meeting Room, 828 I Street, Sacramento
Individuals Signed In: 75
Oral Testimony Speakers: 26
Comment Sheets Submitted: 8
- **Los Angeles** - Tuesday, April 13, 2004, 3:00 - 8:00 PM
Location: Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 1 Gateway Plaza, Los Angeles
Individuals Signed In: 90

Oral Testimony Speakers: 16
Comment Sheets Submitted: 8

- **San Francisco** - Thursday, April 15, 2004, 3:00 - 8:00 PM
Location: State of California Building, 455 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco
Individuals Signed In: 64
Oral Testimony Speakers: 46
Comment Sheets Submitted: 16
- **San Diego** - Tuesday, April 20, 2004, 3:00 - 8:00 PM
Location: San Diego Association of Governments, 401 B Street, San Diego
Individuals Signed In: 34
Oral Testimony Speakers: 10
Comment Sheets Submitted: 4
- **Fresno** - Wednesday, April 28, 2004, 3:00 - 8:00 PM
Location: City of Fresno Council Chambers, 2600 Fresno Street, Fresno
Individuals Signed In: 58
Oral Testimony Speakers: 21
Comment Sheets Submitted: 1
- **San Jose** - Wednesday, May 26, 2004, 1:00 - 3:00 PM
Location: County Government Center, 70 West Hedding Street, San Jose
Individuals Signed In: 90
Speaker Cards Submitted: 58
Comment Sheets Submitted: 4
- **Los Angeles** - Wednesday, June 23, 2004, 1:00 - 3:00 PM
Location: Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 1 Gateway Plaza, Los Angeles
Individuals Signed In: 53
Oral Testimony Speakers: 13
Comment Sheets Submitted: 1

In all, over 450 members of the public attended the public hearings, 190 people provided oral testimony and 42 written comments were submitted. The Authority will address all the comments in the final environmental document.

Written Comments Sent

Written comments were sent to the Authority in the form of letters, faxes, and postcards and were also sent through the Authority's website. Many of the written comments were received at the very end of the comment period. The following lists are the best current counts of comments (number of letters, postcards, and website comments) received. Final counts will be included as part of the Final Program EIR/EIS. These counts represent the number of submittals received. Some of the letters received listed multiple agencies. In addition, a number of individuals and organizations also

orally commented at the public hearings and/or commented both in hardcopy and electronically (through the website).

Letters (Letters/Faxes) Received: 333 total (4 from Federal Agencies, 5 from Federal Representatives, 10 from State Agencies, 4 from State Representatives, 83 from Local Agencies, 84 from Organizations, and 143 from Individuals).

Postcards: 1,411 total (both during and prior to comment period). 456 during comment period (172 of postcard #1, and 284 of postcard #2); 955 prior to comment period (all of postcard #1)

Website: 219 total (6 from local agencies, 9 from organizations, and 204 from individuals)

Overview of Comments Received

The brief summary below provides an overview of the post cards, written letters, comments submitted via the Authority's website, and oral testimony received at the public hearings during the comment period. A complete summary of comments will be included in the Final Program EIR/EIS. Many of the comments supported the concept of a statewide HST system, however disapproval of the project was also expressed in some comments. Most of the comments either favored one HST design option (alignments and/or station locations) over another or favored the inclusion or exclusion of certain design options. Concerns were raised about potential environmental impacts from the construction and operation of HST service. Many concerns about environmental impacts comments dealt with local alignment options, but some of the comments also concerned the potential for the HST system to induce growth. Several environmental organizations questioned the adequacy and detail of the Program EIR/EIS. The following bullets summarize some of the most common comments received:

- Support for a HST system linking California's major metropolitan areas.
- Opposition to HST alignment options through Henry Coe State Park.
- Support for the investigation of the Altamont Pass as an HST alignment option between the Central Valley and the Bay Area.
- Support for the Antelope Valley HST alignment (with a station at Palmdale) for crossing the Tehachapi Mountains between Central Valley and Los Angeles.
- Questions about the sufficiency of the Program EIR/EIS to meet CEQA and NEPA requirements because of a perceived lack of detail and/or design options excluded (primarily concerning the Altamont Pass).
- Support and opposition for specific alignment options between the Bay Area and Central Valley (Pacheco Pass and Diablo Range Northern Crossing option).

- Opposition to alignment options and concerns about impacts to Taylor Yards and the Cornfield site in Los Angeles. Many of the comments relating to Taylor Yards and the Cornfield site requested an extension of the comment period.
- Support for Castle Air Force Base as the HST station location and maintenance facility.
- Opposition to the CCT alignment option for HST service between Sacramento and Stockton.
- Opposition to conventional rail improvement tunneling options through Del Mar, and options with potential impacts to lagoons.
- Support and opposition for the UPRR alignment options between Fresno and Bakersfield (with a potential station at Visalia).
- Opposition to a potential HST station at Los Banos.
- Support for the Transbay Terminal as the Downtown San Francisco HST terminus.
- Concerns relating to the potential for the HST Alternative to induce growth.
- Questions about how the Program EIR/EIS address potential mitigation measures.